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AUTHOR Berty, Ernest
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents suggestions for stimulating and improving the evaluation of teacher education centers in West Virginia. The suggestions stress the following points: a) evaluation procedures must be designed into center activities; b) careful thought must be given to the primary functions the center will execute; c) early judgmental decisions should determine the direction of the evaluation process. Suggestions included are to be used to insure that these and other important considerations are taken into account. (The suggestions cover the following topics: potential audience, objectivity, goals vs. objectives, center direction, process and product objectives, criteria questions, collection of information, time schedule, organization of information, and reporting information.) (Author/MJM)

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SUGGESTIONS
FOR THE
EVALUATION
OF
TEACHER EDUCATION CENTERS
IN
WEST VIRGINIA

AUGUST, 1974

West Virginia Department of Education
Charleston, West Virginia

Ernest Berty
Office of Research

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FOREWORD

The suggestions found herein are offered as a frame of reference to stimulate and improve the quality of evaluation executed under the direction of the Center Coordinator.

These suggestions stress that evaluation needs to be designed into Center activities and not come as an after-thought. The development of an evaluation plan should begin when careful thought is given to the primary functions the Center will execute. In the development of an evaluation plan there are several early judgmental decisions that must be made which will determine the direction of the evaluation process. Such a systematic approach to evaluation cannot be over-emphasized.

The suggestions included are to be used as checking and comparing aids to insure that important considerations are taken into account. This paper presents only essential highlights to achieve emphasis, clarity and brevity. The risk involved in achieving these ends is oversimplication. Thus, the reader is urged to supplement these suggestions with more complete information from other sources once he has his bearings.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
NEED FOR EVALUATION	1
POTENTIAL AUDIENCE	2
OBJECTIVITY	2
GOALS VS. OBJECTIVES	3
CENTER DIRECTION	4
PROCESS AND PRODUCT OBJECTIVES	6
CRITERIA QUESTIONS	8
COLLECTION OF INFORMATION	9
TIME SCHEDULE	9
ORGANIZATION OF INFORMATION	10
REPORTING INFORMATION	10
CHECKLIST	11

NEED FOR EVALUATION

Evaluation in its simplest sense can be considered as the collection of data for the purpose of making decisions. The information collected can serve as a base by decision-makers in shaping the future direction of the teacher education center concept. The teacher education center is one of the "hottest" educational concepts on the scene today. The permanence of the center concept is directly related to the ability of member institutions and their constituencies to see merit in the approach. Thus, a paramount effort has to constantly be made to collect and provide evidence which convincingly demonstrates that the center concept is superior and more effective than conventional approaches. Evaluation should be regarded as the professional tool for marshaling and presenting critical evidence to support any judgment made about the effectiveness of centers.

Unfortunately evaluation is an art and not a science. Existing evaluation techniques are lacking in precision so no single, universal approach is applicable to all programs. Nevertheless, the evaluation plan needs to be designed into the center's program. It should not come as an after-thought to an already existing program, but must be a basic part of the center's activities. This procedure makes it more likely that the evaluation will focus on the pertinent variables as they exist in the program environment and then measure them, rather than at a later time select those variables easiest to measure.

POTENTIAL AUDIENCE

Evaluation responsibility is communication responsibility. It is a responsibility to gather information that will be useful to specific audiences. For what is included in the evaluation report is determined to a large degree by your anticipated audience. Different audiences have different appetities for different information. The immediate staff does not need to be told a lot of things that outsiders have to be told. To increase the understanding of your outside audience, it will be necessary to also include an overall description of the center's program. This may well include information on the services, methods, personnel, facilities, equipment, and materials used to achieve the objectives of the Center. That may seem a wearisome thing to do but, nevertheless, the center's future stands to benefit from the careful thought put into the evaluation report.

OBJECTIVITY

A factor which has contributed to the slow growth of formal evaluation as a professional tool has been the sensitivity of people to criticism. Too often educators have so much professional pride and prejudice invested in a program that they are reluctant to accept any objective evidence which does not support their own convictions. Every evaluation should be executed sincerely with no preconceived notions of what the end results should be or must be. The state of the art of formal evaluation will only begin to improve at an increased rate when this type of resistance to objectivity is reduced to a bare minimum.

GOALS VS. OBJECTIVES

A key feature of any rational planning is the possession of some idea of what is to be accomplished. These intended accomplishments are usually referred to as either goals or objectives. Some people use the terms "goal" or "objective" interchangeably. Other people employ a much more distinctive meaning of the terms, using "goal" to describe a broader description of intent and "objective" to denote a more specific spelling out of the goal. Since evaluation is the process of determining the extent to which the stated accomplishments are achieved, a critical concern is to devise "objectives" which will be terse enough so there will be little doubt in identifying specific indicators for determining the extent to which specified objectives have been reached.

CENTER DIRECTION

In developing an evaluation design most of the work is completed when usefully stated objectives for the program are identified and constructed. Objectives of a specific nature will invariably be measurable in such a way that an unequivocal determination can be made as to whether the objective has been accomplished. From an evaluator's point of view, unmeasurable goals are of little use. The extreme importance of objectives to the development of an adequate evaluative scheme dictates a further discussion of objectives.

An initial and logical step is to identify desirable objectives which may either be confidently attributed to Center activity itself or achieved to a greater degree than in a corresponding conventional non-center approach. The basic problem involved in the process is to conceptualize the needs the Center is expected to meet as well as the origin of the needs. An obvious frame of reference would be the state-level objectives which are stated at varying degrees of generality to give direction to the center movement in West Virginia. The state-level objectives should serve as an overall "umbrella" for the development of individual center aims and purposes.

A commitment has been made at the state-level to focus on the achievement of the following aims and purposes during the early stages of the teacher education center movement in West Virginia:

1. Identification and recruitment of qualified school-based teacher educators
2. Development of appropriate clinical experiences for the preservice teacher
3. Provide inservice education regarding developments and innovations in teacher education for all personnel involved in the center's activities

4. Identification and creation of new and expanded range of sites for clinical experiences

5. Foster experimentation and change in teacher education

6. Harmonize diverse interest and open channels of communication

7. Organize in a manner which promotes parity among the participating agencies

A cursory examination of these objectives will clearly reveal that they are stated at varying degrees of generality. Objective #5 is quite general and will permit a center "architect" to exercise wide latitude in developing the nature and character of a particular center.

Obviously, much professional judgment is involved in translating the state-level objectives into individual center objectives of a specific nature which not only sets the tenor of the center's activities but also serves as a useful framework for the evaluation. Two different groups of professionals at two different centers will not necessarily arrive at the same measurable objectives for the same corresponding state objective. The latter understanding is important in order to avoid freezing present practices of stultify initiative. Also, the limitations on resources, including fiscal, material, and human should be given thoughtful consideration before settling on major center thrusts.

PROCESS AND PRODUCT OBJECTIVES

Do not try to "cover the waterfront!" It is entirely possible that an individual center's objectives may be too numerous to be assessed all at once in any particular annual evaluation. There is nothing wrong with choosing a manageable number of priority objectives which will provide a convenient reference point around which the evaluation process can be organized and refined. In fact, it is better to assess well the achievement of a few objectives than to provide a superficial examination of many. Those objectives of equal importance not included in the evaluation design one year can be attacked next year.

Careful consideration should also be given to a balance between "process" and "product" objectives. Process objectives generally relate to anticipated changes that will occur in the institutions involved or in the quality of the various activities or services provided by the center. Process objectives may include, but are not necessarily limited to, such factors as:

a. interpersonal relationships
b. communication channels
c. logistics
d. understanding of and agreement with intent of Center by persons involved and affected by it
e. adequacy of resources
f. staff
g. physical facilities
h. time schedule

On the other hand, product objectives will generally focus on competencies which targeted participants should acquire. Objectives of this nature may include, but not necessarily be limited to, such competencies as:

a. development of teaching materials
b. communication skills (e.g., explaining and corrective feedback)
c. strategies for effective questioning

d. measurement and evaluation of pupil progress
e. techniques for cross-age teaching
f. planning, organizing and making decisions in preparing to teach

Probably the best approach would be to select a limited number of competencies which Center clientele should acquire, then focus the Center's programs on making certain these behaviors or skills are acquired. For in the final analysis an evaluation design that includes nothing about the product of the Center is as weak as one which fails to mention the quality of the process.

CRITERIA QUESTIONS

Listed below are twelve criteria questions designed to assist the Center Coordinator to conceptualize the overall purpose and function of the Center:

1. Are the objectives of the Center ones which, if accomplished, would improve teacher education practices?
2. Has the Center specified product and process objectives as well as short and long range objectives?
3. Does the Center have a strategy for the realization of its objectives?
4. Do the activities coherently relate to each other so that they form a composite strategy for accomplishing the stated objectives of the Center?
5. Are the activities soundly designed?
6. Does the total Center effort promise a cumulative effect which independent support of the individual activities could not afford?
7. Does the Center allocate its resources systematically toward the improvement of teacher education practices?
8. Has the advisory board instituted sound decision-making procedures in the development of major policy by which the program and management of the Center can exercise its administrative responsibility?
9. Has the Center designed an appropriate evaluation plan?
10. Does the Center's organization facilitate the accomplishment of its program objectives?
11. Does the Center have effective mechanisms for managing its program?
12. Is the Center's internal information management system adequate for keeping financial accounts, program plans, staff information, policy statements, and related data in such a way that they are readily available?

COLLECTION OF INFORMATION

Whenever the major measurable objectives to be evaluated have been identified, the stage will have been set to generate measuring devices which are congruent with each objective. The indicators which accurately reflect the degree to which each objective was achieved should now be apparent. Listed below, in rank order of difficulty, are at least three avenues open in acquiring instruments:

1. Adopt -- use an instrument already being used
2. Adapt -- modify an available instrument to serve the purpose
3. Invent-- design an instrument from "scratch"

The best practice is to adapt or modify an available instrument. Some of the more commonly used measuring devices will consist of rating scales, checklist, opinionnaires, questionnaires, observation scales, interview schedules, and etc.

For each instrument to be administered, identify the group of respondents. Avoid administering too many instruments to the same target group. The use of the random sampling technique can be helpful in reducing the burden on the respondents.

TIME SCHEDULE

Pacing of the evaluation activity, including data collection, should be given careful consideration. The development of a master schedule would be an appropriate control tool. The evaluation activity should be reasonably well distributed so it will not congregate in such a way that the staff will be unduly overburdened. For the purpose of comparison, it will sometimes be necessary to make measurements at the beginning of the year and again at the end of the year.

Careful planning and scheduling of the evaluation activity can prevent the loss of important benchmark data. When using control groups, the data should demonstrate that the differences found were attributable to Center intervention activities, and not to normal growth or achievement.

ORGANIZATION OF INFORMATION

Know what you are going to do with the data before it is collected! Devise a format for tabulating and classifying the information to be collected. Predetermine what analytical procedures will be employed. Have a well thought-out plan for the statistical or descriptive treatment of the information. Nothing is more frustrating than to have collected data and not know what to do with it. A well thought-out plan will facilitate the analysis and presentation of evidence which supports the reported findings and conclusions.

REPORTING INFORMATION

Describe what was evaluated and who, when, where and how the evaluation was conducted. Describe the findings and relate them to each objective. Use measures of central tendency, dispersion, and other descriptive statistical techniques in your description of the findings. Report comparisons made from the collected data. Illustrate summary data in graphic displays, charts and tables. State conclusions where possible that the Center was effective and was superior to other more commonly used approaches. Above all, ensure that decision-makers will have timely access to the information they need and that they will receive it in a manner and form which will facilitate the use of the information.

CHECK LIST

MINIMUM ESSENTIALS FOR EVALUATION DESIGN

	YES	NO
1. Center objectives were identified		
2. Center objectives relate to state-level objectives. . . .		
3. Range of Center activity was designed in relation to objectives.		
4. Attainment of process objectives was included		
5. Attainment of product objectives was included		
6. Measurement process was designed.		
7. Measurement instruments were adapted.		
8. Data-collection procedures were identified.		
9. Data-analysis techniques were devised		
10. Outline for reporting results was constructed		